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The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH

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IT may seem useless or presumptuous to take up once again a problem which has been treated so often. In these pages, however, we do not claim to add yet another solution to those which have already been put forward: our intention is merely to note the developments and the new perspectives to which recent studies have given rise and to offer this essay in tribute to Professor G. Henton Davies who was concerned with the revelation of the divine name in his recent commentary on Exodus.¹

According to the Yahwist tradition, the invocation of the name Yahweh goes back to the origins of humanity, to the time of Enosh, son of Seth (cf. Gen. 4.26). Consequently the Yahwist account of the apparition to Moses in Midian retains only the theophany at the burning bush, Ex. 3.1-5, and the mission of Moses, Ex. 3.16-20.

According to the Elohist tradition of Ex. 3.6, 9-15, God revealed to Moses the meaning of the name Yahweh, by which he wished henceforth to be invoked.² In order to bring this tradition into

¹ G. Henton Davies, *Exodus*, TBC (London: SCM Press, 1967).

² The attribution of this to the Elohist has recently once again been called into question, cf. especially S. Mowinkel, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *HUCA* 32 (1961), pp. 121-33; *Erwägungen zur Pentateuch Quellenfrage* (Tübingen: Universitätsverlag, 1964), p. 64 (the text is

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harmony with that of the Yahwist, it is sometimes said that Moses did not receive the revelation of the name Yahweh, which he already knew, but merely an explanation of it.³ This is to weaken the import of the text, for v. 15 is part of the ancient account⁴ and is explicit: Yahweh is a new name.

This is even more clearly affirmed by the Priestly tradition, which transfers the scene to Egypt (Ex. 6.2-13). God reveals himself under the name Yahweh, which was unknown to the Patriarchs and which was to replace the name El Shaddai by which they had invoked him.

I. THE FORM OF THE NAME

In effect, Yahweh was always to be solely and exclusively the name of the God of Israel. This name is used in two forms in the Bible: the long form יהוה – which is nearly always used – and the short form יה, used in the liturgical acclamation יהללִיךָ and occasionally in poetry. In the composition of proper names of

from J): A. Bezzers, 'L'expression "Fils d'Israel" en Exod. 1-14', *RB* 74 (1967), pp. 321-55, especially pp. 328-33 (the text is from J, with modifications by a priestly redactor who is responsible for v. 15 in particular).

³ This solution is imposed particularly on those who deny the existence of an independent Elohist tradition, such as S. Mowinckel, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *HUCA* 32 (1961), p. 126, or on those who reject all documentary criticism, such as M. H. Segal, 'The Revelation of the Name JHWH', *Tarbiz* 12 (1940-41), pp. 97-108 (Hebrew); *The Pentateuch, its Composition and its Authorship, and Other Biblical Studies* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1967), pp. 4-8. An argument which seems conclusive to certain scholars is that the mother of Moses bears a name compounded with Yahweh, יְהוֹכָד. But this name is given only by late

genealogies: cf. Ex. 6.20; Num. 26.59, and it is not certain that it contains the name Yahweh, cf. M. Noth, *Die israelitischen Personennamen* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1928), p. 111; L. Koehler and W. Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953), p. 372.

⁴ Cf. M. Noth, *Exodus*, trans. J. S. Bowden (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), p. 43; G. Fohrer, *Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus*, *BZAW* 91 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1964), p. 40.

people the divine name assumes shortened forms: יְהוֹ- , -יְהוֹ , -יְה , at the beginning and יְהוֹ- , יְה- , at the end.⁵ Although the question remains a matter for argument, the long form is primitive. It is this form which, standing alone, is used almost exclusively in the Bible and it is this form which Ex. 3.14 is attempting to explain. Outside the Bible the name of the God of Israel is יְהוָה on the stele of Mesha in the ninth century BC, on an eighth century seal,⁶ in the ostraca of Tell Arad at the end of the seventh century,⁷ often in the letters of Lachish⁸ at the beginning of the sixth century, and in *graffiti* which may also well be pre-exilic.⁹ The short form has been read on a potsherd from Samaria, dating from the eighth to the seventh centuries BC as לִיְה ,¹⁰ and on a potsherd from Meggido, dating from the seventh century, as לִיְ ;¹¹ but these readings are uncertain. The two letters יְה on post-exilic

⁵ Outside the Bible -yhw is also found on ostraca and seals.

⁶ Cf. F. M. Cross, 'Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs', *HTR* 55 (Oct., 1962), p. 251.

⁷ Cf. Y. Aharoni, 'Hebrew Ostraca from Tel Arad', *IEJ* 16 (1966), pp. 1-7.

⁸ The two examples of *Yhw* in the Lachish letters which A. Murtonen cites in *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names* אלהים , אלהה , אל and יהוה , *Studia Orientalia* 18, 1 (Helsinki, 1952), p. 43, are faulty readings made by the first editor.

⁹ Cf. J. Naveh, 'Old Hebrew Inscriptions in a Burial Cave', *IEJ* 13 (1963), pp. 74-92.

¹⁰ Cf. G.A. Reisner and C. S. Fisher, *Harvard Excavations at Samaria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924), p. 238, n. 35 and pl. 55b (though it is possible that the three letters form the termination of a theophorous name lost when the sherd was broken). Another example of *lyh* in Aramean script, proposed by E. J. Sukenik, 'Potsherds from Samaria, Inscribed with the Divine Name', *PEQ* (Jan., 1936), pp. 34-37 (cf. S. A. Birnbaum 'Ostraca: Sherds with Letters in Aramaic Script', J. W. Crowfoot and others, *Samaria-Sebaste III: The Objects from Samaria* [London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1957], p. 28), must be discarded.

¹¹ Cf. H. G. May, 'An Inscribed Jar from Megiddo', *AJS* 50 (1933-34), pp. 10-14; R. S. Lamon and G. M. Shipton, *Megiddo I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), pl. 115, 5. But the reading *wāw* is very doubtful.

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official stamps do not represent the divine name¹² but are an abbreviation of יהוה, the name of the province of Judea in the Persian and Hellenistic period.¹³ The short form יהו is constant, save on one occasion (יהוה), in the Elephantine papyri, but the ostraca from the same site always have יהוה.¹⁴ The long form is therefore the older and more frequent form in sources outside the Bible. Moreover a contraction of the long form is more readily explained philologically than the lengthening of a short one.

As to the pronunciation of the name, we know that the Massoretes provided the divine name with the vowels of יהוה, 'my lord', which is to be read in place of the tetragrammaton. The pronunciation *Yahweh* is based on the etymological interpretation given in Ex. 3.14, on the analogy of the Amorite names *Yawi-ilā*, *Yawi-Addu*, *Yawi-Dagan*, which we shall examine later, and on the Greek transcriptions *Iaoue* and *Iaβε*. A pronunciation *Yahwo*¹⁵ had already been proposed and has recently been competently defended. This pronunciation can invoke in its support the Elephantine form יהו which would be pronounced *Yaho*, the abridged forms which the divine name takes in personal names, the transcription *Iaw* in certain Fathers of the church and in Diodorus Siculus 1.94, and the names *Iaw* and *Iao* on gnostic gems, on amulets and in magical papyri of the first five centuries of our era. This argument from Greek transcriptions is the most striking, but it loses its force when it is noted that *Iaw*, originally at least, was possibly nothing more than a mechanical transcription of the Hebrew יהו, and so provides no proof of a pronunciation

¹² *Contra* L. H. Vincent, 'Les épigraphes judéo-araméennes post-exiliques', *RB* 56 (April, 1949), pp. 286-91.

¹³ Cf. Y. Aharoni, 'Excavations at Ramat Rahel, 1954', *IEJ* 6 (1956), pp. 148f.; *Excavations at Ramat Rahel* (Rome: Università Degli Studi/Centro di Studi Semitici, 1962), pp. 6, 30; (1964), pp. 20, 44.

¹⁴ Cf. A. Dupont-Sommer, 'Le syncrétisme religieux des Juifs d'Éléphantine d'après un ostracón araméen inédit', *RHR* 130 (1945), pp. 22-23; *Semitica* II (1949), p. 34.

¹⁵ Cf. W. Vischer, 'Eher Jahwo als Jahwe', *ThZ* 16 (1960), pp. 259-67.

Yao.¹⁶ All things considered the pronunciation *Yahweh*, which is commonly accepted, is preferable.

II. THE NAME YAHWEH OUTSIDE ISRAEL?

Nevertheless this divine name, which was new to Israel and was to remain her exclusive property, could have existed previously elsewhere, and evidence has been sought for it before the time of Moses outside Israel.¹⁷ At one time the ancient Babylonian names *Yaum-ilum* or *Yawum-ilum*, which were translated 'Yahweh is God', were quoted; there is also evidence for the shortened form *Yaum*. But it is now recognized that *Yaum* is the independent pronoun 'mine'.¹⁸

¹⁶ Likewise 'Iaḥ in Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos*, Ps. ii, J. P. Migne, *Patrologiae Graeca* (Paris, 1857-66), vol. XII, 1104, is only a transcription of *Yah*.

¹⁷ The work of A. Murtonen, *The Appearance of the Name YHWH outside Israel*, *Studia Orientalia* 16, 3 (Helsinki, 1951), taken up again in *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names* (cf. above n. 8), pp. 44-54, needs correcting and completing at several points. The name *Aḥi-yawī*, which had been read on a tablet of Taanach (fifteenth century BC), should be read *Aḥi-yami*, cf. W. F. Albright, 'A Prince of Taanach in the Fifteenth Century B.C.', *BASOR* 94 (April, 1944), p. 20. I do not take into account the names of Azriya'u of Ya'udi (Samal) under Tiglath-pileser III and of Ya'ubidi (also called Ilubidi) of Hamath under Sargon II: they date from considerably after the time of Moses and reflect an Israelite influence.

¹⁸ Cf. I. J. Gelb, B. Landsberger, A. L. Oppenheim, E. Reiner *et al.*, *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1964), s.v. *ja'um*, with references, and B. Landsberger, 'Solidarhaftung von Schuldnern in den babyl.-assyrischen Urkunden', *ZA* 35 (1924), p. 24, n. 2; J. Lewy, 'Studies in Akkadian Grammar and Onomatology', *Or* 15 (1964), pp. 362 and 393; W. von Soden, 'Jahwe "Er ist, Er erweist sich"', *WdO* 3, 3 (1964-66), p. 178. Recently, H. Cazelles, 'Mari et l'Ancien Testament', *XV^e Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale*, Liège, 1966 (Paris, 1967), pp. 73-90, especially pp. 82-86, has explained the name of Yahweh itself by this personal pronoun: 'Yaw (Yaum)' would mean 'Mine'. But (a) the pronoun *yaum* is proper to Akkadian and does not exist in West-Semitic, and (b) this does not explain the long form 'Yahweh'.

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It was thought that a god *Yw* had been discovered in a mythological text from Ras Shamra, in which the God El says: 'The name of my son *yw.-ilt . . .*'¹⁹ Although this reading has been contested, it is beyond doubt;²⁰ but the text is obscure and full of lacunae. A connection with Yahweh, proposed by the original editor, is still admitted as possible by certain specialists in Ugaritic,²¹ but it is either rejected or considered very uncertain by others.²² In any case this supposed divine name does not appear again anywhere else in the Ras Shamra texts. As this poem speaks immediately afterwards of the god *Ym* = Yamm, the god of the sea and rivers well known at Ras Shamra, it is possible that *Yw* is a different spelling or the component part of an epithet of this god. But it would be even more difficult to establish an equation between Yamm and Yahweh,²³ and if the primitive form of the divine name is the long form *Yhwh*, the possibility of a borrowing is excluded.

This long form has been compared to the element *Yawi-*, or *Yahwi-*, in the Amorite proper names *Yawi-ilā*, *Yahwi-ilā*, *Yawi-Addu*, *Yawi-Dagan* and *Yahwi-Nasi*. We shall ourselves use these names to shed light on the etymology, form and meaning

¹⁹ C. Virolleaud, *La Déesse 'Anat* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1938), tablet VI AB iv 14 = Cyrus Gordon, 'nt, pl. x in *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1965), p. 255 = *Corpus* Herdner no. 1, see A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939* (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1963).

²⁰ Herdner, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

²¹ Thus Gordon, *op. cit.*, Glossary no. 1084, p. 410; J. Aistleitner, *Wörterbuch der ugaritischen Sprache*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1965), no. 1151.

²² To mention only recent works, cf. J. Gray, 'The God YW in the Religion of Canaan', *JNES* 12 (1953), pp. 278-83; *The Legacy of Canaan*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), pp. 180-4; M. Pope, 'Syrien: Die Mythologie der Ugariter und Phönizier', *Wörterbuch Der Mythologie*, part I, vol. I: *Götter und Mythen im vorderen Orient*, ed. H. W. Haussig (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1965), pp. 291f.

²³ In spite of A. Murtonén, *A Philological and Literary Treatise on the Old Testament Divine Names*, pp. 90-92; E. C. B. MacLaurin, 'YHWH, The Origin of the Tetragrammaton', *VT* 12 (1962), pp. 449-51.

of the name Yahweh. But recently an attempt has been made to see in them the actual name of the God of Israel. They should, it is claimed, be translated: 'El (or Addu, or Dagan . . .) is Yahweh', and they would thus imply the adoption of a god Yahweh by the Amorites at the beginning of the second millennium BC and his assimilation to their own particular gods.²⁴

This explanation is unlikely. These names belong to the numerous class of Amorite names formed of a verb and a divine name. In the present case, the problem is to determine which verbal root is used and in what tense.²⁵ In effect, Accadian does not know 𐎗 and does not generally transcribe it, although sometimes it expresses it by *ḥa*. The forms, *Yawi-N.* and *Yahwi-N.*, could therefore contain the same root *hwy*, 'to be'. But Accadian also does not know *ḥa*, which it generally transcribes by *ḥa*, but which it occasionally omits. The two names could therefore contain the root *ḥwy*, 'to live'. As for the verbal form, Amorite seems to have retained from general Semitic the simple *Qal*, with the forms **yaqtal*, **yaqtil* and **yaqtul* for completed action (perfect-present) and the forms **yaqtalu*, **yaqtilu* and **yaqtulu* for uncompleted action (imperfect-future); the forms of the causative (*Hiph'il*) are respectively **yaqtil* and **yaqtilu*. But, for verbs of the **yaqtil* type in the simple *Qal* and for verbs with the third radical *w/y*, the spelling does not permit any distinction between the simple and the causative.

Leaving aside the uncertainty on the point of the aspect (perfect-present or imperfect-future), several translations of these names are therefore theoretically possible: 'N. lives' or 'N. gives life', 'N. exists' or 'N. brings into existence'. Furthermore, the divine name can be in the vocative: 'He (the child) exists, o N.' or 'He (the child) lives, o N.' Finally, it is possible that a distinction

²⁴ Cf. A. Finet, 'Iawi-Ilâ, roi de Talḥayûm', *Syria* 41 (1964), pp. 117-42, especially pp. 118-22.

²⁵ Cf., most recently, H. B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965), pp. 70-72; W. von Soden, *op. cit.*, pp. 179-81.

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should be drawn between two series of names: *Yaḥwi-N.* formed with the root *ḥwy*, 'to live', and *Yawi-N.* formed with the root *hwy*, 'to be'. In the framework of Amorite onomastic, where other names are formed with the root *ḥwy* and where the causative is frequently used, and bearing in mind also the more frequent transcription of *h* by *ḥ* in Accadian, the most probable explanation of *Yaḥwi-N.* is 'N. gives life', which is very appropriate as a name given to a new-born child.

If *Yawi-N.* is different and contains the root *ḥwy*, 'to be', it would be the only Amorite name formed with this root, but it would have an equivalent in the Accadian names *Ibašši-Ilum*, *Ibašši-Ilāni*, *Ibašši-Adad*. And, in its stative form, *Baši-Ilum*, which means 'the god, the gods, Adad exist', it is neither a simple statement of fact nor a confession of faith, but a grateful homage to the god who has shown himself as existing and active.²⁶ Following this, *Yawi-N.* would mean 'N. exists' rather than 'N. brings into existence', though this latter does, however, remain possible. In any case, the elements *Yaḥwi-* and *Yawi-* are not a divine name.

The only name, outside the Bible and prior to the exodus, which one could legitimately compare with Yahweh is *Yhwz*, which appears as one of the 'Shasu lands' in a geographical list of the time of Amenophis III in a temple at Soleb (Nubia)²⁷ and in a copy of that list in a temple at Amara West (Nubia) from the reign of Ramses II.²⁸ 'Shasu' is a generic name given by the

²⁶ Cf. J. J. Stamm, *Die akkadische Namengebung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1939), p. 179.

²⁷ J. Leclant, 'Fouilles et travaux en Egypte et au Soudan, 1961-62, II: Fouilles au Soudan et découvertes hors d'Egypte', *Or* 32 (1963), p. 203; 'Les fouilles de Soleb...', *Nachrichten der Akad. der Wiss. in Göttingen*, Phil.-Hist. Klasse, 13 (1965), pp. 205-16; R. Givon, 'Toponymes ouest-asiatiques à Soleb', *VT* 14 (1964), pp. 239-55; and in *Fourth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Papers, I (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 193; S. Herrmann, 'Israel in Ägypten', *ZAS* 91 (1964), pp. 63ff.; 'Der alttestamentliche Gottesname', *EvTh* 26 (1966), pp. 281-383.

²⁸ See the list from 'Amara West', which will be edited by H. W. Fairman, *Amara West, I, the Temple*. Provisionally, cf. B. Grdseloff, 'Edôm

Egyptians to the Bedouin living east of their frontier in Sinai, Southern Palestine and Southern Transjordan. The only Shasu name which can be identified in these lists is the 'Shasu' land *S'rr*, obviously Se'ir = Edom. Thus *Yhwz*, as *S'rr*, must be here a geographical name, the name of a region or of a place, or an ethnic name, the name of the group living in that region. It might also have been the name of the god worshipped in that region or by this group, but this is a mere hypothesis. What remains – and it is very important – is that, in a region with which the forefathers of Israel had so many connections, there was, as early as the middle of the second millennium BC, a geographical or ethnic name very similar, if not identical, with the name of the God of Israel.

In conclusion it is possible – it is even likely, given its archaic form – that the divine name *Yhwh* existed outside Israel before Moses, but we have as yet no conclusive proof of this.

III. THE ETYMOLOGY AND MEANING OF THE NAME YAHWEH

We must surely reject an Egyptian etymology, which was propounded almost a century ago and which has recently been taken up again and developed.²⁹ On this view, the name would be composed of two Egyptian words: *Yah*, the god 'moon' and *we3*, 'one'. We must also reject explanations deriving the name from

d'après les sources égyptiennes', *Revue de l'Histoire Juive en Egypte*, I (1947), pp. 79–83; S. H. Horn, 'Jericho in a Topographical List of Ramesses II', *JNES* 12 (1953), p. 201; K. A. Kitchen, 'Some New Light on the Asiatic Wars of Ramesses II', *JEA* 50 (1964), p. 67; H. H. Rowley, 'Moses and Monotheism', *From Moses to Qumran: Studies in the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth Press and New York: Association Press, 1963), pp. 53f.

²⁹ N. Walker, *The Tetragrammaton* (West Ewell, England, 1948); 'Yahwism and the Divine Name "Yhwh"', *ZAW* 70 (1958), pp. 262–5; 'Concerning Ex. 34.6', *JBL* 79 (1960), p. 277; 'The Riddle of the Ass's Head, and the Question of a Trigram', *ZAW* 75 (1963), p. 226. An Egyptologist has criticized this position, cf. J. Vergote, 'Une théorie sur l'origine égyptienne du nom de Yahweh', *ETHL* 39 (1963), pp. 447–52.

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Indo-european, where *Dyau-s*, which became Zeus in Greek and Ju-piter in Latin, would have become *Yaw* in Hebrew;³⁰ or those deriving it from Hurrian, where *Ya* would mean 'god' and would have been lengthened by the Hurrian suffixes *-ha* or *-wa*;³¹ or finally those which seek an origin in the undeciphered writing from the Indus Valley dating from the third millennium BC where, it is claimed, mention is made of a god *Yaé* or *Yaue*.³²

It is clearly in the Semitic field that we must search. There the name has been explained as a cultic exclamation, formed from the interjection *ya*, which is current in Arabic, and from the personal pronoun *huwa*, 'he': thus, *Ya-huwa*, 'O he', which would be at the root of the long form *Yhwh* as well as at that of the short form *Yhw*.³³ In fact, the personal pronoun of the third person appears to be used at times in the Bible as a substitute for, or an equivalent of, the divine name.³⁴ Thus the proper name אֱלֹהֵינוּ is parallel to the names אֱבִיָּה, אֱבִיָּהוּ, אֱבִיָּאל. Similarly אֱלֹהֵינוּ (also written אֱלִיָּהוּ) is equivalent to אֱלִיָּהוּ and אֱלִיָּה. In the same way מִיָּכָהוּ (without the final א, but cf. אֱלִיָּהוּ) is comparable to מִיָּכָאל, מִיָּכָהוּ and מִיָּכָה. Lastly, the name יְהוֹא is composed of the abbreviated divine name *Yo-* (which changed to *ye-* before the sound *u*) and the pronoun הוּא. Deutero-Isaiah frequently uses the formula אֲנִי הוּא, 'I he', that is, 'I am he' (Isa. 43.10, 13; cf. also 41.4;

³⁰ Cf. E. Littmann, 'Review of *Le Inscrizioni Antico-Ebraiche Palestinesi, raccolte e illustrate* by David Diringer', *AFO* 11 (1936), p. 162.

³¹ Cf. J. Lewy, 'Influences hurrites en Israel', *RES* (1938), pp. 49-75, especially pp. 55-61.

³² Cf. B. Hrozný, 'Inschriften und Kultur der Proto-Inder von Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa, II', *ArOr* 13 (1942), pp. 1-102, especially pp. 52ff.

³³ Cf. M. Buber, *Moses* (Oxford: East and West Library, 1946 and New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1958), pp. 49f. and above all S. Mowinckel, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *HUCA* 32 (1961), pp. 121-33, especially pp. 131-3.

³⁴ So Mowinckel, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *HUCA* 32 (1961), and Hans Kosmala, 'The Name of God (YHWH and HŪ)', *ASTI* 2 (1963), pp. 103-6. Cf. also N. Walker, 'Concerning HŪ' and 'ANĪ HŪ', *ZAW* 74 (1962), pp. 205f.

48.12, possibly 52.6 [cf. Deut. 32.39]); compare also Ps. 102.28 (EW, v. 27), **וְאַתָּה הוּא**, 'thou art he'. At Qumran, in a paraphrase of Isa. 40.3, the tetragrammaton is replaced by **הוּא־הוּא**,³⁵ and the Rabbis were to use **הוּא** in the same way. Outside Israel, but still in Semitic circles, the *dhikr* of the Moslem confraternities consists in the indefinite repetition of the divine name in different forms; in particular, *Allah-hu* followed by an epithet, or simply *Huwa*, 'he'.³⁶

The following observations can be made. In the proper names cited, the personal pronoun definitely refers to God and means that this God, Elohim or Yahweh, is the God of him who bears the name. Thus **אֲבִי־הוּא** means 'he is my father', **אֱלֹהֵי־הוּא**, 'he is my God', **מִי־כָאֵל**, 'who is like him (God)?' and **הוּא־יְהוָה**, 'he is Yahweh'.³⁷ Likewise the Moslem invocation means 'he is Allah'. But it is impossible to say that **הוּא** is a divine name, or even, properly speaking, that it is a substitute for one; in **הוּא־יְהוָה**, **הוּא** is obviously not a substitute for Yahweh. In the biblical texts quoted, this idea of a personal God evolves to that of the one God, cf. especially Isa. 43.10, Deut. 32.39, and of the God who remains always the same, cf. especially Isa. 41.4; 48.12; Ps. 102.28 (EJV, v. 27); cf. also Job 3.19 where in Sheol 'the small and the great are **הוּא**, "the same"'.³⁸ In Isa. 52.6, the translation should be 'It is I who . . .', cf. 51.9 'It is thou who . . .'.

³⁵ Man. Disc. 8.13 and cf. 3.17, 25; 4.25, where **הוּא־הוּא** takes the place of 'God'.

³⁶ Cf. L. Gardet, 'dhikr', *Encyclopédie de l'Islam*, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), vol. II, pp. 223-6; 'Un problème de mystique comparée: la mention du nom divin (*dhikr*) dans la mystique musulmane', *Revue Thomiste* 52 (1952), pp. 642-79, especially p. 633.

³⁷ Cf. Noth, *Die Israelitischen Personenamen*, pp. 143 f. Cf. the Ugaritic name *hw'il* = *Huwa'il*, 'He is El (God)', C. Virolleaud, *Le Palais Royal d'Ugarit* II, Mission de Ras Shamra, vol. VII, ed. C. F. A. Schaeffer (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale et Librairie C. Klincksieck, 1957), p. 132, no. 104, line 7.

³⁸ This is the meaning which the *Lexicon* of Koehler-Baumgartner gives to all these texts. Compare Mal. 3.6: 'I am Yahweh, I do not change.'

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It is far more likely that the name contains a verbal root and, according to the spelling, this root should be *hwh*, the ancient *hwy*. There was a root *הוה* (*הוא*) in Hebrew with the sense 'to fall'. The verb is used once, Job 37.6, and from it derive two substantives; *הִתְהַרְס*, 'destruction' and *הִתְהַרְסָה*, 'disaster'. There is ample evidence for this root in Arabic, where *hwy* means 'to fall' or 'to throw down', and on account of this an attempt has been made to explain the name Yahweh as the god of storms, thunder and lightnings.³⁹ In Arabic there is also a root *hwy* with the sense of 'to love, to act with passion', and Hebrew contains a corresponding substantive, *הִתְהַרְסָה*, meaning 'desire'. Yahweh would then be he who loves and acts with passion, 'the Passionate One'.⁴⁰ But the verb is not employed in Hebrew, which uses a related form *הִתְהַרְסָה*, 'to desire', and the substantive *הִתְהַרְסָה*, which is rare (cf. Micah 7.3; Prov. 10.3; 11.6), always has the pejorative sense of 'lust'. Moreover, these two hypotheses seem to involve an improper usage of Arabic in which the meaning of ancient roots has in fact undergone a great development and diversification.

Almost all recent authors derive the name *Yhwh* from the north-western Semitic root *hwy*, 'to be'. There is perhaps evidence of it in Amorite, as we have seen, in the proper names of the *Yawi-ilā* group, and it may also have existed in Ugaritic.⁴¹ However, the normal root which signifies 'to be' in both Amorite and Ugaritic is *kwn* and this is the only one attested in the Canaanite of the Amarna letters and in Phoenician. In Accadian, the phonetic equivalent *ewu/emu* means 'to turn oneself into', 'to become like',

³⁹ So, earlier, P. de Lagarde, J. Wellhausen; cf. also H. Bauer and P. Leander, *Historische Grammatik der hebraischen Sprache* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), vol. I, p. 24, n. 2.

⁴⁰ Cf. S. D. Goitein, 'YHWH The Passionate', *VT* 6 (1956), pp. 1-9.

⁴¹ In a quadrilingual lexicon which remains as yet unedited, opposite Sumerian, Accadian and Hurrite words meaning 'to be', we find the Ugaritic *hwy*, cf. C. Virolleaud, *Comptes-Rendus du GLECS*, vol. VIII, p. 66; C. H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, Glossary no. 754b. But note the reservations of F. M. Cross, *HTR* 55 (Oct., 1962), p. 254, n. 124, on this reading.

which in the causative is 'to turn into', 'to make like'. But the root is current in Aramean and its dialects, from the oldest inscriptions⁴² right down to biblical and post-biblical Aramaic, as well in Nabatean, Palmyrenian and Syriac, in the forms *hwh*, *hw*' and *hwy*. In biblical Hebrew the use of the Aramaic root *hwh* is exceptional,⁴³ cf. Gen. 27.29; Isa. 16.4; Eccles. 2.22; 11.3; Neh. 6.6. The first reference occurs in an old, poetic text which could have retained the primitive form; in the other cases *hwh* is an Aramaism. In fact, the verb became *היה* in Hebrew. In this case, then, the name Yahweh would have preserved the archaic form of the root. It remains to determine in what grammatical form it is found there.

Some have tried to explain the name as a participle, and support for this has been found in some odd turns of phrase in the Phoenician inscription of Karatepe (eighth century BC), where a verbal form *yqtl* is followed by the independent pronoun of the first person. This is taken as a causative participle with a preformative *y* instead of the normal *m*. The name Yahweh would then mean 'he who supports, maintains, establishes'.⁴⁴ But this explanation is unacceptable⁴⁵ and the Karatepe forms are generally interpreted as infinitives followed by the personal pronoun.⁴⁶ Such an infinitive, without the determining pronoun, could never have become a proper name.

A case has also been made out for seeing in *Yhwh* a descriptive

⁴² References in Ch. F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer, *Dictionnaire des Inscriptions Sémitiques de l'Ouest* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), p. 63.

⁴³ Cf. M. Wagner, *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramaismen in alttestamentlichen Hebräisch*, BZAW 96 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), p. 45.

⁴⁴ Cf. J. Obermann, 'The Divine Name YHWH in the Light of Recent Discoveries', *JBL* 68 (1949), pp. 301-23; 'Phoenician *yqtl* 'nk', *JNES* 9 (1950), pp. 94-100; 'Survival of an Old Canaanite Participle and its Impact on Biblical Exegesis', *JBL* 70 (1951), pp. 200-9, and elsewhere.

⁴⁵ Cf. G. R. Driver, 'Reflections on Recent Articles', *JBL* 73 (1954), pp. 125-31.

⁴⁶ Cf. J. M. Solá-Solé, *L'Infinitif Sémitique* (Paris: H. Champion, 1961), pp. 110-18.

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substantive formed with the prefix *ya*, and certain analogous formations in Hebrew have been cited in support, e.g., יְהָמֹר, a kind of antelope (the 'red'); יִלְקוּט, the shepherd's wallet (the 'receptacle'); יְנִשּׁוּף, a bird, perhaps the screech owl⁴⁷ (the 'blower'); יָרִיב, the adversary at law (the 'plaintiff'). Yahweh would then be described as 'The One who Is', 'The One who Exists'.⁴⁸ But this type of substantive is extremely rare, and can be explained as a substantified verbal imperfect;⁴⁹ this is, in fact, the explanation for the name Yahweh to which we shall adhere.

There exist in Hebrew certain personal names which may be explained in this way by a verb finite in form, and which are not hypocoristica as the names Jacob(-el) and Isaac(-el) certainly are. This explanation could be put forward for the names of Esau's sons, יְעֹשֶׁ and יַעֲלֵם (cf. Gen. 36.5, 14, 18), and for those of a descendant of Judah, יִדְבָּשׁ (I Chron. 4.3), and a descendant of Issachar, יִבְשָׁם (I Chron. 7.2). There would be nothing extraordinary in a divine name being formed in this fashion. The pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped a god *Yagūt* (the name is identical with that of Esau's son יְעֹשֶׁ), 'he helps', and also a god *Ya'ūq*, 'he prevents (misfortune)'.⁵⁰ It remains to decide whether the name Yahweh contains the verb 'to be' in the simple form 'he is' or in the causative form 'he causes to be'.

⁴⁷ Cf. G. R. Driver, 'Birds in the Old Testament: I. Birds in Law', *PEQ* (April, 1955), p. 15.

⁴⁸ Cf. L. Koehler, 'Jod als hebräische Nominal prefix', *WdO* I (1950), pp. 404-5; Koehler and Baumgartner, *Lexicon*, pp. 357a, 369a; G. Beer, *Hebräische Grammatik*, vol. I, 2nd ed., rev. by R. Meyer (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1952), ¶40, 3.

⁴⁹ So W. von Soden, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. Wellhausen, *Reste arabisches Heidenthums*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1897), pp. 19-24; M. Höfner, 'Die Stammesgruppen Nord- und Zentralarabiens in vorislamischer Zeit', *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, *op. cit.*, pp. 478f.; T. Fahd, *Le panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la veille de l'hégire* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1968), pp. 191-7.

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A certain number of authors favour this second solution.⁵¹ The form *Yahweh*, they say, is a causative (*yaqtīl*); the simple form would be *Yihweh* (*yīqtōl*) and the name would therefore mean 'he causes to be', 'he is the creator'. The short form *Yahu* would be the corresponding jussive. To this, the objection has been raised that such an idea was too abstract and philosophical for so early a period,⁵² or that it does not correspond with the biblical notion of God.⁵³ These objections are invalid. They deny to Israel notions which had long been widespread among the people who surrounded her. But the philological objections are more serious.

In this hypothesis the name *Yahweh* is compared with the Amorite names *Yahwi-ilā* and *Yawi-ilā*, which are regarded as causatives. But we have already seen that it was impossible to distinguish, from the spelling alone, between the simple and causative forms of verbs with a weak third radical. The passage of the preformative *ya-* to *yi-*, of **yaqtul(u)* to *yīqtōl*, which characterizes Hebrew, had not yet come about in Amorite, at least not in proper names.⁵⁴ It is true that this change was in process in Ugaritic and in the Canaanite of the Amarna letters and that it finally occurs in classical Hebrew. But this preformative *ya-* could, in the name *Yahweh*, be a mark of archaism, as in the use of the root *hwh* instead of the root *hyh*. It has also been pointed out that in Hebrew the verb הָיָה is never used in the causative and

⁵¹ Cf. especially, W. F. Albright, 'Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology, 2. The Name Yahweh', *JBL* 43 (1924), pp. 370-8; *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), pp. 197-9; 'Review of *L'épithète divine Jahvé S'ba'ôt: Étude philologique, historique et exégétique*, by B. N. Wambacq', *JBL* 67 (1948), pp. 379f.; 'Jethro, Hobab and Reuel in Early Hebrew Tradition', *CBQ* 25 (1963), p. 10, and his disciples, especially D. N. Freedman, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *JBL* 79 (1960), pp. 151-6; F. M. Cross, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

⁵² Cf. among others Mowinckel, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *HUCA* 32 (1961) p. 128.

⁵³ So von Soden, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

⁵⁴ Cf. H. B. Huffman, *op. cit.*, p. 64, cf. n. 25.

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that other roots are used to mean 'to make', 'to create';⁵⁵ but this is unconvincing since Aramaic and Syriac regularly use the causative of *hwy/hw'*. The strongest objection to this hypothesis is that it necessitates a correction of the text (Ex. 3.14) which gives the explanation of the name Yahweh. To this problem we shall return.

We consider then that the most likely solution is that the name Yahweh is formed from the root *הוה/הוי*, used in the imperfect of the simple form, and that it means 'he is'. But, in Hebrew, this root had become *היה* and the vocalization of the verbal form had been modified: the name cannot be explained from the Hebrew which we know. This causes some difficulty for the interpretation given in Ex. 3.14, and this gives us good reason for presuming the name to be pre-Israelite, although we have seen that, so far, it is not certainly attested outside Israel before the time of Moses.

IV. THE BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE NAME YAHWEH

But what we are above all concerned with is the interpretation given to this name in the theophany at the burning bush, Ex. 3.13-15:

[13] Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?'

[14] God said to Moses, 'אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה'. And he said, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "אֶהְיֶה has sent me to you." '

[15] God also said to Moses, 'Say this to the people of Israel, "יהוה, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you": this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.'

This is the only explicit explanation of the divine name in the Bible. It is in keeping with the philological interpretation which

⁵⁵ This is the principal objection raised by W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. I, trans. John Baker (London: SCM Press and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 187.

we have advocated, for it recognizes in the name the simple imperfect of the root 'to be'. Those who postulate a causative sense are forced to presume that the primitive formula was **אֶהְיֶה** **אֲשֶׁר יִהְיֶה**: 'I cause to be what comes into existence.'⁵⁶ And for this restoration they can call upon Egyptian parallels such as 'he is the one who makes exist that which will exist' in a hymn to Amenhemet III,⁵⁷ or the invocation to 'him who makes everything exist' found several times in the great hymn to Amon.⁵⁸ Alternatively one could simply change the vocalization to **אֶהְיֶה** **אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה**: 'I cause to be that which I cause to be, I create that which I create.'⁵⁹ The formula would have been corrected when the old causative of **הָיָה** became obsolete. But, since philology does not enable us to establish the causative sense of the name Yahweh, to correct the Massoretic text in order to make it conform to a hypothesis is totally arbitrary. It is the text itself which must be explained.

At a first reading one has the impression of witnessing the formation of the divine name. God is the One who Is. Speaking of himself he cannot say 'he is', which would be tantamount to recognizing a Being other than himself. He must say 'I am', and it is 'I am' who will send Moses. But Moses cannot say 'I am', since he is not the One who Is: he says, therefore, 'he is'.

But the text is obviously overweighted. In v. 13 Moses asks the name of the God of the fathers; v. 14 does not give the answer, since the God of Israel was never called **אֶהְיֶה**. The answer is

⁵⁶ Cf. P. Haupt, 'Der Name Jahwe', *OLZ* 12 (1909), col. 211-14; W. F. Albright, 'Contributions to Biblical Archaeology and Philology, 2. The Name Yahweh', *JBL* 43 (1924), pp. 376f.; *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 198.

⁵⁷ On a stele in the Cairo Museum, cf. M. Kamel, 'The Stela of Sehetep-ib-rē' in the Egyptian Museum', *ASAE* 40 (1940-41), pp. 209-29, see p. 217.

⁵⁸ *ANET*, 2nd ed. (Princeton University Press, 1955), pp. 365-7.

⁵⁹ D. N. Freedman, 'The Name of the God of Moses', *JBL* 79 (1960), pp. 152f.

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given in v. 15: the name of the God of the fathers is Yahweh. Moreover, there are certain repetitions: '[14] God said . . . And he said . . . [15] God also said. . . .' It appears that v. 15 is basic, that v. 14a has been added to provide an explanation of the name and that v. 14b, which uses the same words as v. 15 except for אֱלֹהִים instead of יְהוָה, is a link between the name itself and the explanation of it.⁶⁰ It thus appears that the name Yahweh—whatever its original meaning may have been—came to Israel from outside and was then explained and given a new religious sense.⁶¹

What is the explanation which is given? In Hebrew, the ancient form for completed action (perfect-present), **yaqtul*, has disappeared and been replaced by the *qaṭal* and the *wayyiqtol*, the form for uncompleted action (imperfect-future), **yaqtulu*, has become *yiqtol*. Whatever the solution to the thorny problem of the 'tenses' or 'aspects' of the Hebrew verb,⁶² the use of the verb הָיָה is sufficiently clear. The *yiqtol* of the verb הָיָה as an active verb, 'to happen, to become', is sometimes used to express the frequentative past, as in Num. 9.16, 20f.: 'and so it was', more rarely for the frequentative present, as in Eccles. 1.9: 'what will continue

⁶⁰ Following M. Noth, *Exodus*, p. 43, against those who hold v. 15 to be secondary. But v. 14 represents an early development of the Elohist tradition, as Noth says; it is not a late gloss as B. D. Eerdmans claims in *Alttestamentliche Studien* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1910), pp. 12–14. The text of Ex. 3.14 was already known to Hosea, cf. below.

⁶¹ See W. Zimmerli, *Gottes Offenbarung* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1963), p. 280; R. C. Dentan, *The Knowledge of God in Ancient Israel* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1968), pp. 131 and 257, n. 7.

⁶² Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Hebräische Syntax* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsverein, 1956), pp. 37–45, with references to previous works; F. Rundgren, *Das althebräische Verbum: Abriss der Aspektlehre* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell, 1961), and the review by R. Meyer, *OLZ* 59 (1964), col. 117–26; A. Sperber, *A Historical Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), especially pp. 587–92. The work of O. L. Barnes, *A New Approach to the Problem of the Hebrew Tenses* (Oxford: J. Thornton and Son, 1965), throws little light on the question.

to be'. The *yiqtol* of יִהְיֶה as a stative verb, 'to be', always has a future sense, 'he will be'.⁶³ According to normal Hebrew usage, the formula would therefore mean 'I shall be who I shall be', and it is thus that both Aquila and Theodotion rendered it: ἔσομαι ὅς ἔσομαι.

It has recently been affirmed that this is the correct meaning.⁶⁴ In the preceding verses God says to Moses, 'I will send you . . . that you may bring forth my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt' (Ex. 3.10). And later, 'I will be with you' (Ex. 3.12). A little further on, on two occasions, God says to him 'I will be with your mouth' (Ex. 4.12, 15). In this context of salvation and promise, the name Yahweh would mean that God will always be present with Israel. The same perspective is found again in the Priestly account of the revelation of the divine name, 'And I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians' (Ex. 6.7). The formula, 'I will take you for my people, and I will be your God', was to become a summary of the Covenant and it is particularly frequent in Jeremiah and Ezekiel.⁶⁵

We shall see that these ideas of presence, promise and covenant are indeed embodied in the theophany of Ex. 3, but it seems difficult to allow that, in Ex. 3.14, אֶהְיֶה should be translated by a future. In all the parallel texts which have been cited, 'I shall be' is determined by an addition. One can say: 'I shall be this or that, I shall be with . . . like . . . for . . .', but one cannot say absolutely 'I shall be' in the first person, as this would suggest that the

⁶³ Cf. P. Joüon, *Grammaire de l'hébreu biblique*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1947), paras. 111 i and 113a.

⁶⁴ Cf. R. Abba, 'The Divine Name Yahweh', *JBL* 80 (1961), pp. 320–28.

⁶⁵ The texts are collected by K. Baltzer, *Das Bundesformular* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1960), p. 46; J. L'Hour, *La Morale de l'alliance* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1966), p. 35. Cf. R. Smend, *Die Bundesformel* (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1963), pp. 5ff.

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speaker does not yet exist. It is quite true that the formula 'I shall be who I shall be' is so determined, but this is the explanation of the name, which is itself absolute, and cannot be translated by 'I shall be'. It would seem that this future is only an apparent one, and that it originates from the effort made to interpret the old name Yahweh by the same Hebrew grammatical form, although that form no longer expressed the completed action (perfect-present) of the ancient **yaqtul*. It is this sense which should be retained here rather than that of normal Hebrew usage. It is thus that the LXX understood it, 'Εγώ εἰμὶ, as do almost all modern translations.

The formula of Ex. 3.14 employs a stylistic device which is sometimes incorrectly termed 'paranomasia'.⁶⁶ Linguistically, paranomasia is the juxtaposition of words which, though they show a certain similarity, either etymological or merely formal and external, do not have the same sense.⁶⁷ In this verse, it is a case of the repeated use of the same root with the same sense, and what interests us is the use of the same verb in the same person both in the principal clause and also in the dependent relative clause. This is a stylistic device in which Arab authors particularly indulge, but which is common to the Semitic languages and which serves several purposes.⁶⁸ The device is found several times in Hebrew where it is used to express something undetermined: 'Send him whom you will send' (Ex. 4.13); 'Bake what you will bake and boil what you will boil' (Ex. 16.23); 'They went whithersoever they went' (I Sam. 23.13); 'I go whither I go' (II Sam. 15.20); 'Sojourn wherever you can sojourn' (II Kings 8.1), etc.

⁶⁶ Cf. P. Joüon, *op. cit.*, para. 158 o; H. Reckendorf, *Über Paranomasie in den semitischen Sprachen* (Giessen, 1909).

⁶⁷ Cf. J. Marouzeau, *Lexique de la terminologie linguistique* (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1933). It is in this correct sense that the word is understood in the case of Hebrew by I. M. Casanowitz, *Paranomasia in the Old Testament* (Boston, 1894) and E. König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, Poetik* (Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlags, Theodor Weicher, 1900), pp. 291ff.

⁶⁸ Cf. H. Reckendorf, *op. cit.*, pp. 156f.; T. C. Vriezen, 'Ehje 'Ašer 'Ehje', *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet*, ed. W. Baumgartner and others (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1950), pp. 498-511.

According to certain authors,⁶⁹ this undetermined sense could well be that of the formula used in Ex. 3.14. 'I am who I am', 'I am that I am' would be an evasive answer. Yahweh would be refusing to reveal the mystery of his being: he is the Unnameable, the Incomprehensible, the Indeterminable. A comparison is sometimes made with the scene at the Jabbok, where Jacob asks the name of the mysterious being with whom he is wrestling, and this being replies: 'Why is it that you ask my name?' (Gen. 32.30).⁷⁰ When Manoah puts the same question, Yahweh's angel replies, 'Why do you ask my name, seeing it is wonderful?' (Judg. 13.18). But precisely in these two cases the divinity is refusing to give his name, whereas in Ex. 3.13-15, he is revealing it: this name is Yahweh. The formula must therefore have a positive sense. The conclusion is all the more certain if, as we have shown, v. 15 is original and v. 14 secondary. The formula 'I am who I am' is not an evasive answer, but an attempt at explaining the divine name which has been revealed, and this explanation must of necessity be positive.

Furthermore, the same stylistic device can also express totality or intensity. Thus, 'I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (Ex. 33.19), means 'I am indeed he who is gracious and shows mercy'. 'I will speak the word which I will speak, and it will be performed' (Ezek. 12.25) means 'All my words will be performed'. 'When they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name' (Ezek. 36.20) means 'Among all the nations where they came they profaned my name'. One can draw a parallel between this intensive meaning and a remarkably similar Egyptian expression. In the Instructions to his son Meri-ka-re',

⁶⁹ A. M. Dubarle, 'La signification du nom Iahweh', *RSPTh* 35 (1951), pp. 3-21, with references to previous works; G. Lambert, 'Que signifie le nom divin YHWH?', *NRTh* 74 (1952), pp. 897-915, and with variations, O. Eissfeldt, 'Jahwe, der Gott der Väter', *ThLZ* 88 (1963), cols. 481-90, esp. col. 483.

⁷⁰ This parallel is developed by O. Eissfeldt, 'Jakobs Begegnung mit El und Moses Begegnung mit Jahwe', *OLZ* 58 (1963), cols. 325-31.

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at the end of the third millennium BC, the Pharaoh Akhthoës, speaking of his victories over the Bedouin who were threatening the frontiers of Egypt, says 'I am while I am'.⁷¹ This is an affirmation that he exists and that he acts with power.

We should perhaps go a step further. A century ago A. Knobel and E. Reuss translated our text: 'I am he who is',⁷² by analogy with the rule of Hebrew syntax that, when the subject of the principal clause is in the first or second person, the corresponding word in the relative clause is in the same person.⁷³ Recently, this translation has again been adopted and supported by fuller arguments.⁷⁴ A comparison has been drawn between 'I am Yahweh who (i.e., *I*) brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans' (Gen. 15.7) and the stereotyped phrase: 'I am Yahweh your God, who (i.e., *I*) brought you out of the land of Egypt' (cf. Ex. 20.2; 29.46; Lev. 19.36; 25.28; Deut. 5.6, etc.). Also, 'Are you the man who (i.e., *you*) came from Judah?' (I Kings 13.14) and 'It is I who (i.e., *I*) have sinned and done very wickedly' (I Chron. 21.17). If Ex. 3.14 had for its text אֲנִי הָיָה אֲשֶׁר יְהִיָּה, one would not hesitate to translate 'I am he who is', and one can hold that this is the sense which the writer had in mind, since he wished to explain the name Yahweh as the verb 'to be' in the third person; but this syntactical rule prevented his saying it. This is the sense which the LXX translators, who understood Hebrew, retained: 'Εγώ εἰμί ὁ ὢν.

Whether one accepts the translation 'I am he who is', or whether one adheres to the more current 'I am that I am', the formula

⁷¹ *ANET*, 2nd ed., p. 416 (l. 95); cf. A. Alt, 'Ein ägyptisches Gegenstück zu Ex. 3.14', *ZAW* 58 (1940), pp. 159f.

⁷² Cf. A. Knobel, *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Kommentar zum AT. Die Bücher Exodus und Leviticus* (Leipzig, 1857); E. Reuss, *La Bible* (Paris, 1879).

⁷³ Cf. C. Brockelmann, *op. cit.*, ¶153 a.

⁷⁴ E. Schild, 'On Exodus iii 14 - "I am that I am"', *VT* 4 (1954), pp. 296-302; J. Lindblom, 'Nóch einmal die Deutung des Jahwe-Namen', *ASTI* 3 (1964), pp. 4-15. But see the reservations of O. Eissfeldt, 'Äh'yäh 'šär 'ah'yäh 'Ēl 'ôlām', *FuF* 39 (1965), pp. 298-300.

still explains the name Yahweh in terms of the verb 'to be'. One must take care not to introduce into it the metaphysical notion of Being in itself, of aseity as elaborated by Greek philosophy. However, it is not certain, though it is sometimes said, that the LXX translation already reflects the influence of Greek thought, and we shall come to the LXX interpretation without any such supposition. But the influence of Greek thought is manifest in the Wisdom of Solomon, where the whole creation is contrasted with 'he who is' (cf. Wisd. Sol. 13.1). This metaphysical sense was developed by the mediaeval scholastics and is still retained in some Old Testament 'Theologies'.⁷⁵ Such a notion is foreign to the biblical mentality, for which 'to be' is first and foremost 'to exist' – in the terms of existentialist philosophy, a *Dasein*. But this existence, this *Dasein*, is realized in many different ways, and there is a danger of loading the formula of Ex. 3.14 with all the potentialities of existence and, finally, of including in it the whole biblical teaching about God.⁷⁶

We shall not review all the proposed solutions, both ancient and modern, but simply accept the usual meaning of the verb *הָיָה* and its function in the Hebrew language. In the phrase *אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר* *אֲהִיָּה*, the relative clause *אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה* is the predicate of *אֲהִיָּה*; as are many relative clauses, this one is the equivalent of a participle. Again, we adhere to the LXX translation. With another verb and

⁷⁵ Cf. P. Heinisch, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. W. Heidt (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1950), pp. 55–57; F. Ceuppens, *Theologia Biblica*, vol. I, 2nd ed. (Rome: Taurini, Marietti, 1949), pp. 27, 30.

⁷⁶ Cf. C. H. Ratschow, *Werden und Wirken. Eine Untersuchung des Wortes hajah als Beitrag zur Wirklichkeitserfassung des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1941), p. 81; T. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, trans. J. Moreau (London: SCM Press, 1960 and Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 49, for whom Ex. 3.14 means that there is no other *hayah* like the *hayah* of God which includes at one and the same time 'being' and 'becoming', 'existence' and 'action'. Cf. the incisive criticism of this approach by J. Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 68–72, although he does not refer specifically to our text.

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in a different context, Hebrew would use the personal pronoun **אֲנִי** followed by a participle. But the participle of **הָיָה** is never used, and the first **אֶהְיֶה** takes the place of **אֲנִי** because the explanation plays on the etymology of the name Yahweh and the verb had to be given prominence. Now if we replace the relative clause by the divine name (which its purpose is to explain), it will be seen that the formula of Ex. 3.14 is equivalent to **אֲנִי 'הוּוֹה**, 'I am Yahweh'.

This expression⁷⁷ occurs repeatedly in the parallel Priestly account (cf. Ex. 6.2, 6, 7, 8) and is also very frequent in the Priestly source in the Pentateuch in general, in particular in the 'Holiness Code', and in Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel. But it is already found in the Yahwist (cf. Gen. 15.7; 28.13) as well as in the Elohist (Ex. 20.2); and in Hosea it occurs with reference to the revelation of the divine name in Ex. 3, 'I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt' (Hos. 12.10 [EVV, v. 9]; 13.4).

In sum, the best rendering of the formula of Ex. 3.14 is 'I am He who Exists'. Yahweh is the God whom Israel must recognize as really existing.⁷⁸ The exegesis of this verse could stop there, and we must remember that the text is intended to give us an explanation of the divine name and not a definition of God.

But, for a Semite, a proper name is itself a definition of the person who bears it, and one might ask what meaning the Elohist writer gave to the name Yahweh when he explained it as 'He who Exists'. The enquiry should not begin from a philosophy of Being, nor from the possible uses of the Hebrew verb **הָיָה**, nor from the general biblical concept of God. It must start from the immediate context or from near at hand in the same source, and it can extend to embrace the rest of the Elohist tradition, but not beyond.

⁷⁷ Cf. W. Zimmerli, 'Ich bin Jahwe', *Geschichte und Altes Testament*, A. Alt *Festschrift* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1953), pp. 179-209; K. Elliger, 'Ich bin der Herr - euer Gott', *Theologie als Glaubenswagnis*, K. Heim *Festschrift* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1954), pp. 9-34.

⁷⁸ Cf. J. Lindblom, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

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As to the context, immediately before the revelation of the name God calls Israel his people (Ex. 3.10); it is this people which Moses is to bring out of Egypt (Ex. 3.11), and God will be with Moses for this purpose (Ex. 3.12). When the Elohist source resumes after the revelation, Yahweh says to Moses: 'I will be with your mouth' (Ex. 4.12), and again: 'I will be with your mouth and with his (Aaron's) mouth' (Ex. 4.15). According to Ex. 4.22f., which there is no reason to deny to the Elohist,⁷⁹ Moses is to say to Pharaoh: "Thus says Yahweh, "Israel is my first-born son . . . let my son go." ' Yahweh, then, is 'with Moses'. Already the God of the Fathers had been with Abraham (Gen. 21.22 [E]); with Isaac (Gen. 26.3, 28 [J]) and with Jacob (Gen. 28.15; 31.3 [J]).

It was a personal or family relationship, he was the father's God. Now Yahweh is with Moses for the service of the people, and it is with the people that Yahweh is united in a remarkable way. Israel is his people, his first-born son. The care of the people is of prime importance: Yahweh sends Moses to lead them out of Egypt and orders Pharaoh to let them go, and it is for their good that he reveals his name. The consequence is implicit: Israel must recognize that Yahweh is for her the only one who exists and the only saviour. This is not a dogmatic definition of an abstract monotheism, but the injunction of a practical monotheism,⁸⁰ and henceforth Israel will have no other God but Yahweh. Furthermore, the fundamental article of the people's faith is already included in this revelation: it is Yahweh who will bring the people out of Egypt, compare Ex. 3.9-11 with Deut. 26.5-9. And last, the way is paved for the Covenant: Israel becomes the people of God.

We meet these ideas again in a more explicit form, in the same Elohist tradition, in connection with the theophany at Mount Horeb, which complements that of the burning bush and is foreshadowed in it; cf. Ex. 3.12 and Ex. 3.1. It is on Mount Horeb,

⁷⁹ Cf. G. Fohrer, *Überlieferung und Geschichte des Exodus*, BZAW 91 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1964), p. 41.

⁸⁰ So Lindblom, *loc. cit.*; G. W. Anderson, *History and Religion of Israel* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 37.

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through the medium of Moses, that Yahweh solemnly joins himself to his people by means of a covenant of which the Decalogue is the charter. The proclamation of the Decalogue begins with 'I am Yahweh', and we have already noted how this corresponds with the formula of Ex. 3.14, and goes on to recall God's act of deliverance, 'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt' (Ex. 20.2; first announced in Ex. 3.9f.). The first commandment is: 'You shall have no other gods before me' (Ex. 20.3). Yahweh demands an exclusive worship, for he is a 'jealous God' (Ex. 20.5). He is the only one who Exists. In Ex. 33,⁸¹ Moses asks Yahweh to reveal to him his יְהוָה, his mode of being (Ex. 33.13), and Yahweh replies: 'I will proclaim before you my name "Yahweh"; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy' (Ex. 33.19). This seems to be parallel to Ex. 3.14, with its use of the same stylistic device. The commentary on this declaration is to be found in Ex. 34.6, where it is not easy to decide to which source the verse belongs: 'Yahweh passed before him (Moses), and proclaimed, "Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious . . ."'

If we consider the Elohist tradition as a whole and what differentiates its doctrine from that of the Yahwist tradition,⁸² we can distinguish the following elements in the revelation of Ex. 3.9-15: the special interest accorded to the people, the awareness of the transcendence and mystery of God, and the manifestation and activity of God realized through the medium of Moses.

One might also call upon Hosea as a witness to the Elohist

⁸¹ Scholars generally do not attempt to distinguish between J and E in this chapter and M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichte des Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1960), p. 33, n. 114, does not detect any traces of E there. But H. Seebass does find traces of E in the verses that I refer to and draws attention to their similarity to Ex. 3.13f., which anticipates and summarizes the Sinai tradition, cf. his *Mose und Aaron: Sinai und Gottesberg* (Bonn: H. Bouvier and Co. Verlag, 1962), pp. 18f., 23f.; *Der Erzvater Israel und die Einführung der Jahweverehrung in Kanaan*, BZAW 98 (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann, 1966), pp. 58, 61.

⁸² Cf. L. Ruppert, 'Der Elohist - Sprecher für Gottes Volk', *Wort und Botschaft*, ed. J. Schreiner (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1967), pp. 108-17.

tradition.⁸³ In his work one can find several reminiscences of, and a kind of commentary on, the theophany at the burning bush. He speaks of Moses as a prophet (Hos. 12.4, EVV, v. 3), which recalls Ex. 4.12, 15, cf. 16, and is taken up again in Deut. 18.15. He places in Egypt the beginning of faith in Yahweh: 'I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt . . .' (Hos. 12.10 [EVV, v. 9]), and from this he draws the inference: 'I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt: you know no God but me, and besides me there is no saviour' (Hos. 13.4). Since the time in Egypt, Yahweh has called Israel his son (cf. Ex. 4.22), but the more he so called him, the more this son sacrificed to the Baals (Hos. 11.1f.). Hosea contains the only explicit reference to the formula of Ex. 3.14 which can be found in the whole of the Old Testament: 'Call his name לֹא עַמִּי, for you are not my people and for you I am not, לֹא אֱהְיֶה' (Hos. 1.9).⁸⁴ The parallel with לֹא עַמִּי makes לֹא אֱהְיֶה into a proper name: just as 'my people' in Ex. 3.10 becomes 'Not-my-people', so אֱהְיֶה in Ex. 3.14b becomes לֹא אֱהְיֶה. Israel's infidelity has broken the covenant which the theophany at the burning bush foreshadowed and which was concluded on Mount Horeb. But this covenant will be restored: instead of calling the Israelites 'Not-my-people', they will be called 'Sons of the living God' (Hos. 2.1 [EVV, 1.10]).

Illuminated thus by its context and placed in the setting of the Elohist tradition, the explanation of the divine name in Ex. 3.14 can be interpreted as follows: Yahweh is the only real 'Existing

⁸³ Cf. O. Procksch, *Das nordhebräische Sagenbuch. Die Elohimquelle* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1909), pp. 248–55; S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilswartungen im Alten Testament*, BWANT V, 5 (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1965), p. 108.

⁸⁴ Cf. H. W. Wolff, *Dodekapropheten, I. Hosea*, 2nd ed. (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung der Erziehungsvereins, 1965), pp. 23f.; E. Jacob, *Osée*, etc. (Neuchâtel: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1965), p. 22. The correction 'I shall not be *your* God', adopted by many critics and recently by A. Weiser, *Die Propheten: Hosea*, etc., 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1967) and R. Smend, *op. cit.*, p. 38, n. 73 is supported by only a few minuscules of the LXX.

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One'. This means that he is transcendent and remains a mystery for man. But he is active in the history of his people Israel, and this people must recognize him as its only God and its only saviour. The narrative of Ex. 3.9-15 underlines at the same time the continuity of this faith with that of the fathers and also the novelty expressed by the divine name thus interpreted. It is by its adherence to that faith that the people of Israel will come into being as a nation, and it is on that faith that its religion will be founded. Israel will be united by belief in a God who has no sacred history, such as have the mythological gods, because he is simply, totally and forever the Existing One, but also one who, at the same time, directs the course of human events.

He is a God who reveals himself not in the natural phenomena of the cycle of the seasons, as do the gods of fertility and vegetation, but who shows himself in events which follow one another in time and which he directs towards a goal. This is a religious concept totally different from those which the Hebrews had known in Egypt, and from those which they were to find in Canaan. The historian of religions cannot help but be struck by this extraordinary novelty, while the believer will see in it the intervention of God. Exodus 3.14 contains in embryo the developments which the progress of revelation will draw from it, and, in the perspective of faith, the profound meaning which theologians have read into it is justified. Without going outside the Bible, 'I am he who exists' finds its echo and its commentary in the last book of the Scriptures: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty' (Rev. 1.8).